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January 12, 2006
Immediate Release

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Secretary Ron Curry Seeks Meeting with New Los Alamos Laboratory Management on Legacy Environmental Issues

(Santa Fe, NM) — New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Secretary Ron Curry this week invited incoming Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) Director Michael Anastasio and Deputy Director John Mitchell to discuss their plans for addressing the laboratory's 60 years of legacy environmental waste.

"This task is arguably the most important you will undertake, as some of these polluted sites present significant risk now and for generations to come," Secretary Curry wrote Anastasio and Mitchell in his January 11, 2006, letter. "We expect that you will take these environmental and legacy waste concerns as seriously as we do, and that you've prepared, in your bid to win the management contract for LANL, a plan for incorporating cleanup and investigation into your day-to-day operations."

Secretary Curry said that a meeting with the incoming laboratory management team on these issues and the "fence-to-fence" cleanup agreement is imperative before the management transition advances much further over the next six months.

LANL's new management team, Los Alamos National Security, LLC, will be required to abide by the cleanup agreement, or Consent Order, between New Mexico, the U.S. Department of Energy, and the University of California, that was signed in March 2005. It sets a schedule for environmental clean up work, which must be completed by 2015.

"We expect work driven by the Order will reveal new areas of contamination," Secretary Curry wrote, citing the recent detection of chromium in the Los Alamos regional aquifer that far exceeds state and federal standards as an example.

"The lab's groundwater monitoring program is in its infancy, so it is not surprising that it is beginning to detect contamination," Curry wrote. "Nevertheless, the lab must be aggressive in investigating, devising remedies for, and cleaning up polluted sites. I'm sure you share my concern for New Mexico, our environment, and the health and welfare of the people who live here. The new lab management has a unique opportunity to be leaders in environmental awareness and stewardship"

For more information, contact Adam Rankin, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.

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